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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH NUJOMA

REF: WINDHOEK 407

Classified By: Ambassador Dennise Mathieu, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) On February 2, Ambassador met with former Namibian President and founding father, Sam Nujoma. Nujoma was in good spirits and spoke enthusiastically about the new U.S. administration and its potential impact on U.S. foreign policy. He also briefly commented on the state of democracy in Namibia and the situation in Zimbabwe. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador paid a courtesy call on Sam Nujoma at his office on February 2. Ambassador had not seen the former president since she called on him a year ago. Nujoma began by congratulating Ambassador on the U.S. elections. He said several times during the course of the conversation that Namibians were expecting more interaction and more commercial trade with the United States as a result of President Obama taking office. He also expressed his hope that he would be able to meet with Ambassador more frequently during 2009.

¶3. (SBU) When asked about the state of Namibia's business climate, Nujoma replied that recent discoveries of additional deposits of uranium in Namibia would benefit the energy sector. Diamonds, by contrast, had been badly affected by the global financial crisis. Namibia, he added, needed to be less dependent on the import and export of raw materials.

¶4. (C) Ambassador inquired into Nujoma's thoughts on the state of Namibia's democracy in light of the upcoming elections and a front page story in the day's issue of "The Namibian," which reported that the SWAPO Party Elders' Council (SPEC) asked the newspaper to stop publishing readers' instant messages that criticize President Pohamba or Nujoma himself. (Note: The article quoted the SPEC Secretary as saying the instant messages were promoting "hatred and public discontent, whose consequences will be too ghastly to contemplate." In addition, the story claimed the Minister of Information was instructed to put an end to "dangerous radio programs" and chat shows "before the situation gets out of control." End note.) Nujoma responded that Namibia's "policy" of free expression was certainly correct, but that it "must be done in a constructive way (that) does not cause problems for Namibians." He added that tolerance was the key to the success of Namibia's young democracy and that Namibia had much to learn from other nations.

¶5. (C) Nujoma was pleased with news that the ZANU-PF and MDC parties in Zimbabwe had agreed to form a power-sharing government. He believes that once the government forms and the two parties begin exchanging views, thorny issues, such as the sharing of various ministries, will be resolved. Ambassador explained that the USG stood ready to support a government of national unity if a true power-sharing arrangement emerged, violence ceased, and those who had been kidnapped were accounted for. She also opined that a sustainable land policy should be developed, particularly in light of the recent SADC Tribunal decision. The former president said he was optimistic the situation would improve now.

¶6. (C) Comment: The 79-year-old Nujoma seemed as physically

and mentally agile has he did during Ambassador's last visit in December 2007. He clearly follows current events both at home and abroad. However, his comments were short on substance, especially given some accounts that he still calls the shots in the SWAPO party and is extremely influential in Namibian politics. It is possible that Nujoma purposefully affects this posture with visitors, because he technically has no official title in the party or government. It is also possible that Nujoma is given credit for influencing situations, such as ostracizing and driving out members of SWAPO who do not toe the party line (reftel), for which the credit belongs to others. It is worth noting that Nujoma appeared to be enthusiastic about future meetings with Ambassador. In 2008, however, Nujoma did not accept any Embassy invitations.

MATHIEU